

Team Communication Techniques Quick Guide

Communicating with your team during change is essential to ensuring the team stays engaged and on task. This quick guide has tips and techniques for communicating during times of change. As teams progress through the stages of development – forming, storming, norming, and performing – their need for communication changes. When a team is just getting together, the forming stage provides the most challenge for communication. This quick guide will provide guidance for communicating in the forming stage and offer direction for the other stages as well. These tips are also adaptable to remote/virtual teams

What you'll find in this guide:

- Employee communication during change
- Key communication a leader should use
- Communication during one-on-one and team meetings
- Creating a communication plan
- Communication tools
- Conflict resolution

Employee Communication during Change

Change creates differences in the way employees communicate including in the way they trust each other, how they listen and what they share. In times of change employees are:

- Less trusting
- Not as straight-forward and direct
- More careful when choosing the words they use
- Fearful of disagreeing with management (old or new)
- Spending more energy looking out for self
- More open to the message of the rumor mill (especially in the absence of information)

Key Communication Topics

These topics are important when teams are in the early stage of development:

- Common purpose of the team
- Roles, skills and responsibilities of team members
- Anticipated journey of team development including the predictable highs and lows
 - Forming – coming together as a group for the first time (this may be with new team members, new leader, or both); communication should be clear and specific.
 - Storming – feelings of frustration and negative reactions to leaders and other team members with a drop in productivity; communication should be open to conflict and focused on coaching
 - Norming – Trust and respect is developed among team members
 - Performing – Strength, confidence, performance
- Priorities of the team
- State of the business and planned/anticipated changes

Holding One-on-One Meetings

It is important to keep the commitment to holding one-on-one meetings with your staff. These are some tips for holding one-on-one meetings. This time should be focused on the employee and his/her needs.

- Prepare with an agenda and objectives for the meeting
- Meet in a private (office or meeting room with a door)
- Turn the phone, PDA, and computer off – no distractions!
- Schedule more time than expected (if scheduled for 30, put 45 on your calendar)
- Talk 20%, listen 80%
 - Ask questions
 - Respond to questions
 - Discuss
- Key topics
 - Roles and responsibilities on the team
 - Performance goals with the team/company
 - Strengths and challenges
 - Concerns and issues that impact the team and individual
 - Development, interests, and opportunities

Communicating during Team Meetings

Holding team meetings is an important part of developing teams, especially in the early stages. When conducting a team meeting remember to:

- Prepare with an agenda and objectives for the meeting
- Meet in a private (meeting room and/or teleconference)
- Establish basic rules (see Meeting Management Quick Guide)
- Speak directly about what you know (and also what you don't know)
- Focus team on purpose and tasks – control what can be controlled
- Build trust through icebreakers and relationship building exercises

Create a Communication Plan

A communication plan is created with the team and agreed to by the team. It is a way to ensure that communication is carried out consistently. It applies to both local and virtual teams. The communication plan should be written and shared by all team members. A communication plan includes the following categories *with examples*:

Goals – what you intend to accomplish with your communication

Ensure that all members are well-informed about team activities and business status. Provide information each person needs to get his/her work done and feel a valuable part of the team. Create a climate where people feel safe discussing with and challenging each other.

Expectations of team members – what do the team members expect from each other as well as what are the leader's expectations

We expect team members to be on time to meetings. If the team member cannot be on time, we expect he/she will take responsibility correcting action.

Formal Methods – team, ad-hoc, and one-on-one meetings

- Team meetings:
We will meet as a team weekly at 3:00 PM for one hour
- Ad hoc meetings:
The team will meet on an as-needed basis. In order to meet, team members must have at least 12 hours notice in order to adjust schedules
- One-on-one meetings:
The team leader and each team member will meet once a month for 30 minutes based on the meeting schedule agreed to by the team
- Ideal communication methods:
The team will use e-mail to communicate information between members and only include the members that are impacted. In the event of misunderstanding or conflict, team members will talk with one another (phone or face-to-face).

Informal Methods – communication outside of a formal meeting

If a decision is made during an informal conversation, the team members involved will inform the team leader. The team leader will communicate the decision to the team via e-mail